

CAMP UK

10/2012



**THE ULTIMATE POST-2012
UNIVERSITY SURVIVAL GUIDE
(UK EDITION)**

VLAD MACKEVIC

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THE ULTIMATE POST-2012 UNIVERSITY SURVIVAL GUIDE (UK EDITION)

VLAD MACKEVIC

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PUBLISHED IN ASSOCIATION WITH

WWW.THELECTUREROOM.CO.UK

AND WWW.FIRSTYEARCOUNTS.COM

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INTRODUCTION

ATTEN-TION!

Say goodbye to your old life. Forget everything that you've learnt before because life starts anew here. Welcome to Camp UK 10/2012. If you thought it was going to be easy, think again.

After so many years of hard work, sleepless nights spent revising for your A-Levels, preparation and worrying, you've finally made it to university. You are probably looking forward to your new life, possibly away from home. You could be feeling a little nervous. Whatever your expectations are, prepare to be surprised.

I've written this book in order to surprise you, and maybe even shock you, to make you think and to help you. The information it contains will blow your mind! I have to tell you right from the start that you are reading it at your own risk. But it's a risk that is totally worth taking.

This book tells you the truth about university and about the real world out there. It tells you about the challenges that modern students face and about ways to overcome them.

Let's start with the bad stuff. In the past (it can already be called 'distant'), it was enough to walk into a company waving a piece of paper that proved you had listened to lectures for three years and obtained your degree, and you would be hired almost immediately. Having a degree was the key to a skilled job.

Nowadays, things have changed. Modern students and graduates are facing four main challenges during and after their university lives:

1. Too many graduates and too few jobs

Let's face it: everyone has a degree nowadays. Universities offer courses in everything – from accounting to Zulu studies – and hundreds of thousands of young people with a Bachelor's degree enter the job market every year.

Moreover, competition among graduates with good degrees is tough: in 2011, one in seven graduates was awarded a first class and over a half of those finishing university ended up with a 2:1.

In the meantime, the number of vacancies is not keeping up with the number of graduates. Every year, a number of graduates remain unemployed, have to do unpaid work for the sake of work experience (which not everyone can afford) or stay in jobs where they cannot realise their full potential. The competition for good jobs is also threateningly high: a single vacancy can easily receive 200 applications, and in areas like law or financial services the number is double or even triple.

So, all new students who enter university in 2012, as well as those who started earlier, face the same problem: how to stand out? How to be better than your neighbour who is also going to get a 2:1? How to attract an employer who filters the applications based only on academic achievement?

2. Too many unfilled vacancies

Isn't it a paradox? So many graduates, so few jobs – and still, employers struggle to fill the vacancies. How is it even possible? Why is this happening?

The answer is very simple: graduates fail to match the employers' requirements. According to recent surveys carried out by the Association of Graduate Recruiters, employers' demands become stricter as competition toughens. At the same time, students do perform well academically but fail on 'soft skills' such as efficient written and spoken communication, teamwork, interpersonal skills, active on-the-job learning, work ethic and others.

The biggest problem of modern students and graduates is not unemployment, but unemployability caused by the lack of necessary skills.

There are many ways to acquire 'soft skills', and I will talk about them in detail here. One of the ways is by having *any* job, paid or unpaid. By merely being in the world of work, you can pick up basic skills and contacts (networking also seems to be one of the best ways to learn what's available). Moreover, you can also develop these skills by performing well academically and getting involved in university life beside your studies.

But how do you get that first job? And even if you do, will this bartender/waitress/sales associate experience really matter when it comes to a serious job interview? How do you *make it matter*? And how do you acquire those 'soft skills' for the time when you will need them?

This leads to the third challenge:

3. Everyone demands work experience

Yes, almost all employers say that they will only consider those applicants for graduate and even placement positions who already have some work experience – ideally, it should also be relevant.

It's easy to explain why this is the case. First of all, recruiters want serious, committed individuals who are not afraid of hard work, are willing to learn new skills and already know what it means to have a job and to show up every day, no matter if you feel like getting up or not.

If the latter is fine with you, then the following questions arise:

1. How to get work experience while you're still an undergraduate?
2. How to get *serious* work experience that extends beyond the range of so-called 'usual student jobs'?

3. How to draw benefit from every little bit of work experience you have got?

4. University is becoming more and more expensive

Education costs are soaring. The generation of the year 2012 will have to pay £9,000 per year in university tuition fees and, as a result, will accumulate substantial debt by the time they graduate.

The problems are obvious: how to make the most out of your time at university? How to make every hour of every day count towards your degree, towards your employability, and towards your future? How to make sure that you get your money's worth?

I will tell you the truth: university offers a lot for your tuition fees. You just need to know where to find what you need and how to make best use of it.

Naturally, the current economic and educational climate is not the easiest one, both for those entering university this year and for those who are already studying. The problems I have listed above are likely to stay the same in the years to come.

The good news is that you are holding the answers in your hands. I have written this book because I would like to share my own experience – what I have observed in myself and my classmates whilst at university – with you. I want to tell you what I wish I had known when I was an undergraduate. A lot of advice I am giving in this book came to me one way or another long after my graduation.

However, your generation cannot afford to wait till graduation. You have to take things seriously right from the start – from the first days of the first year.

The advice found here will help you gain an advantage and compete even with older graduates. It will help you become a professional from the first day of the first year. This book answers the main questions all current undergraduate students are asking:

- How do I stand out in the crowd of graduates where everyone has a good degree and some work experience?
- How do I obtain valuable transferable skills that all employers demand?
- How do I gain some serious work experience that extends beyond the range of usual student jobs?
- How do I get my money's worth out of university? What am I really paying for?
- How do I use every opportunity to develop personally, academically and professionally so that my time is spent in the most efficient manner?

I am ready to give you the answers. I have written this book with a view to helping you become more employable and prepared for real life than you could have ever imagined. However, before we start, I would like to point out a couple of things. First of all, this book is entirely subjective. It is largely based on my personal experience. I cannot guarantee that having read it you will immediately get a great job. What I can say, however, is that those who do nothing, get nowhere.

So, let's start with the basics – what you need to do to get where you want to be.

DEAR READER,

IF YOU LIKE THIS BOOK AND ARE TIRED OF READING FROM THE SCREEN, YOU CAN PURCHASE THE PAPERBACK BOOK OR THE KINDLE EBOOK VERSION FROM AMAZON.CO.UK

CHAPTER 1

THE BIGGEST LIE IN YOUR (UNIVERSITY) LIFE

This is one of those moments you might remember for the rest of your life. It is celebration time and all family members are calling to congratulate you. After years of hard work, revision, probably one or two sleepless nights, you've *finally made it to university*.

Congratulations once again! You arrive on campus, hardly able to believe your luck – three years full of adventures that will change your life lie ahead of you. You are excited. You are proud. You are slightly worried. You brace yourself for a new life.

And then it happens.

As soon as the rumbling of the engine of your parents' car abates in the distance, as soon as you step into the crowd, ready to plunge into the new life headfirst – you are told something that is probably the biggest lie you will ever hear during your university life.

This lie sounds too good for you to start doubting it – and this where its danger lies. It is capable of turning an optimistic, determined, enthusiastic fresher into a lazy couch potato and opportunity waster.

This lie is: ***the first year of university does not count.***

One of the reasons why I have written this book is because I want to counter this lie and protect all students from the danger it poses.

It is a dangerous lie because... it's partially true. I agree that the first year of university sometimes feels like 'a gap year you never intended to take' – especially after all the A-level related pressure. However, everyone who does a gap year decides to spend it in a different way: some just choose to indulge in travelling and making their gap year one big party; others go to the Third World and help building a school or a hospital in a local village. It is up to you how you spend your time.

Yes, the grades of your first year do not count towards your final grade at the end of your final year (although currently it is being planned to revolutionise the system by introducing new 'report cards' and redesigning degree classification systems altogether). However, too many Freshers are tricked into believing that they can just keep having fun, doing the bare minimum of schoolwork needed to pass the first year, and watching television and playing sports in all the time that remains.

I have to disappoint you – life's not that easy any more. This lifestyle might have been acceptable 10 years ago, but now the situation is too desperate to continue living like that.

The first year *does count* and its significance is paramount. The most obvious reason why it counts is because it's *your time*. Imagine someone told you that one year of your life is worthless; that the effort you make during that time counts for nothing. How would this make you feel? How would you react? I can bet you'd challenge this person because your time is worth *everything* for you. You wouldn't be at university unless you thought it was worth your time. You are also reading this book because you think it's worth investing your time in it.

Moreover, imagine this situation:

You are applying for a summer internship at the end of your first year or start looking for a work placement at the start of your second year.

Most probably, your employer will want to see your academic credentials, especially if you have little or no relevant

work experience. What are you going to tell your future boss? 'Hey, look here, I got 54% average in the first year, but in the second year I promise to have no less than 68%'?

No one's going to fall for that.

Therefore, unless you are not planning to do an internship or gain any work experience at all (which is the worst thing you can do), the grades of the first year *do* count.

Moreover, even though your first year grades do not count towards your academic progress (which is also likely to change in the future, looking at the current education reforms), it is still worth making more effort in the first year because many second year modules are based on what you learn in your first year. In other words, the better you perform in the beginning, the less effort you will have to make later. If you need more information on how to obtain higher grades without snapping from overwork in the process, you can find great tips in my book *From Confusion to Conclusion: How to Write a First-Class Essay*. Free samples of the book as well as related articles can be downloaded from my website:

www.FirstYearCounts.com

as well as from the website I write for:

www.TheLectureRoom.co.uk

Yet, there is no need to study to the point of exhaustion. The best way is to find a healthy balance between your studies and extra-curricular activities (I will talk a lot about those in this book!). Since the grades of the first year are not nearly as important for your academic progress as those of the second or the final year, I strongly advise you to spend as much time as you can allowing developing non-academic skills by 'doing a lot of stuff' – engaging in extra-curricular activities with clubs and societies and gaining serious work experience.

In summary, your first year does count. It counts towards your studies, your skills, your work experience and, above all, your future. I have written this book to show you how to *make*

it count and gain maximum advantage, taking all the benefits you can from your university life, starting from the first day of the first year. Read on and find out how to do it!

DEAR READER,

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CHAPTER 2

WHOM WAS THIS BOOK WRITTEN FOR?

This book was written for all students who want to make it big at university – for everyone who wishes to develop their skills, become more employable and have a lot of fun in the process.

Yet, above all, I would like to highlight a very special part of my readership: students who, for one reason or another, chose to study what some would call ‘a soft subject’. These include:

- Social Sciences (Sociology, Social Work, Politics, International Relations, etc.)
- Creative Studies (Film Studies, Media Studies, Creative Writing, Journalism, Art Design, Fine Arts, etc.)
- The Humanities (English Language and Literature, History, Philosophy, Classics, Theology and other subjects whose aim is to teach you to read between the lines)
- Foreign Languages (although those subjects can hardly be called ‘soft’. As we all know, languages are difficult subjects!)
- Business Studies (especially general business administration and marketing)

I have chosen to include the last category because nowadays even a good business degree is no longer a guarantee of a good graduate position in the field. Be it

investment banking or simple administrative office work, both are extremely hard to get into.

However, even if you have chosen to study a focused, rigorous subject like law, finance, engineering, mathematics, medicine, biology or natural sciences like physics or chemistry, please do not close the book yet. Just flick through the pages – it will take you only a few minutes, and even scientists may find some advice on employability which might be of particular interest to them.

So, why am I specifically targeting those groups?

Because, in my view, they are the most vulnerable when it comes to the harsh competition in the job market. Those studying medicine-related subjects, law or finance have always been fewer and, hence, faced less competition. Moreover, for most of those people, the career path has been pretty straightforward: study hard, get a prestigious internship in a high-profile organisation and then either move on to further studies or land a good job. For the majority of young people currently in higher education, this is not the case.

So, what about us, poor ‘soft subject’ students? What are we to do when jobs are so hard to come by, when tuition fees have soared sky-high and the number of graduates exceeds the number of jobs tenfold if not more? What do you do to secure a good position that does not involve stacking shelves?

There is another challenge, too: humanities and creative arts students have relatively few contact hours with their lecturers and can really feel lost, not knowing what to do with their time. I mean, come on, how many hours a day can you actually spend on studying? It is perfectly normal that students slip into procrastination and get carried away in a tempting whirlpool of mid-week parties. How do you deal with all those ‘time holes’ in your schedule?

The short answer to those questions is: use your time wisely to start developing your skills early. The long answer led me to writing this book. I have written it because I want to give you advice I wish I had been given in my first year. Advice that

will make you employable and help you develop skills that all recruiters are looking for. Moreover, I promise that you will have a lot of fun in the process.

I am sorry for sounding like an infomercial – but this is what I’m offering here.

All students have to make effort in the current climate. More effort to get better grades, more effort to obtain the so-much-desired work experience, more effort to stand out and get noticed by the employers... but for the stigmatised students of the so-called ‘soft subjects’ the effort has to be double:

First of all, they have to fight for jobs just like everyone else;

Secondly, they have to fight the misconception and prejudice about the fact that they’ve chosen an ‘easy option’ (I will deal with these myths in **Chapter 5: A Kind Word about the ‘Soft Subjects’**).

I am writing this to tell you how to:

- Make the most of your time at university;
- Gain work experience without ever leaving the campus;
- Acquire the skills that are essential at every workplace and present them on your CV with maximum effect (please see my book *How to Write a CV with Little or No Work Experience* that can be downloaded for FREE from *First Year Counts* and *The Lecture Room’s* websites;
- Create a *community* of fans, friends, clients and supporters around you as a professional from the first days of the first year.

However, I must also warn you: there is no magic bullet. Nor will it be easy. Sorry for the cliché, but the only place where success comes before work is a dictionary. You will have to put in the work, because it’s the only way to become outstanding. And that’s what you want, right?

I suppose I speak too much about having a (corporate) job and becoming employable so that Mr. Big Boss likes you. Some

of you might find this odd: after all, perhaps during the course of your studies you will realise you want to open your own company or even establish a charity after graduation. Or perhaps you will want to carry on studying and work in academia afterwards. Perhaps you want to be an artist, to be free and independent and have nothing to do with all those 'horrible corporate sour-faces'. You might think you do not need skills that a corporate employee needs.

I'm sorry, but I'll have to disappoint you again. When opening a business you become more than just a sole entrepreneur or an employer. You become your own employee, and there is nothing worse than opening your own company and having no skills that enhance your employability. You are working for yourself and if you don't know how to do your job well, you will lose everything. Opening a charity is the same as opening a business – except that profit is not a top priority. Yet, although filling your own pockets might not be as important, raising money and establishing meaningful business relationships will be paramount. Want to be an artist, a musician or a writer? Well, think about who will market you and put your products and services before your audience while you are still unknown! It will be you who does it, and no one else.

No, employability skills are everything. Sticking up your nose and saying that you have nothing in common with corporate employees is certainly not an option.

The same applies to working in academia. Although to you it might seem slightly removed from the real world, the academic world has never been more business, money and job-market oriented. Gone are the days when the world of academia was an 'ivory tower' full of eccentric folks with their minds somewhere out there. Education has become a big business and needs money in order to function effectively, giving students the best services (from lectures and seminars to bathrooms and internet connection).

So, whatever career you choose after graduating, employability has never been more important.

Some of the ideas you will find here never entered my head when I was an undergraduate. But, I suppose, it is the way of things: knowledge can only come with experience. I can tell you one thing for sure: I wish that back then I had had some of the ideas I am sharing with you now. I entered university when life looked bright. I managed without those tips for a year and a half, participating in the normal range of student activities: studying, having a part-time job in retail, sitting at the canal and playing my guitar, and partying from time to time.

It took me some time to realise that I shouldn't settle for silver when I could get gold. I started developing myself as a professional to get a work placement, to enhance my CV, and, eventually, to become an author entrepreneur by acquiring new skills through trial and error. But I could have started much earlier.

Your situation is different: you cannot afford the luxury of idleness. *You cannot afford starting later.* As soon as you arrive on campus you are in danger of becoming sucked in and overwhelmed. You've got to find ways to stand out from the crowd right away.

From the first day of the first year.

What is more, with the help of this book, you will find out how to enjoy it, too!

A few words about the cover image

The cover of *CAMP UK 10/2012* has been deliberately designed to show you what awaits you. On the one hand, you're just a student in a T-shirt; on the other, you're a soldier. The student is your exterior, the soldier – your spirit. I don't really like breaking it to you, but as soon as you step onto the campus, from the first days of the first year, you enter a state of war. And it is not war against your classmates or other graduates. It is war against your own stereotypes of university life. Prepare to be surprised. Prepare to be challenged. Prepare for a lot of positive change. Prepare to win the war!

For those who might be slightly shocked by my belligerent attitude, I repeat once again: your classmates are not your enemies. Think of the war as a game of paintball or capture-the-flag. You want to win – but you don't want to destroy everything around you in the process. However, you must have a strategy that works, you have to mobilise your resources and act boldly.

I don't promise it will be easy – but it will sure be worth it!

CHAPTER 3

WHY ARE YOU AT UNIVERSITY?

Each person's reasons for entering university are different. Yet, if we were to divide all students into groups according to what they are exactly doing at their institution, we would come up with four groups:

Group #1

Those who know exactly what they want from their courses

Most of them study vocational subjects like natural and life sciences, or number-based subjects like finance, engineering and computer science. Yet, it is not rare to see someone who studies humanities and social sciences in their midst – after all, there are people who want to be nothing else but teachers (perhaps even lecturers), social workers, archaeologists, translators and playwrights.

Yet, for all those who are doing a degree it is important to realise that your professional abilities are by no means limited by your degree. Someone with a degree in theology can become an IT consultant; a medicine graduate can become an actor or a singer-songwriter; an architect can open his or her own business that does not have to be related to architecture. There is nothing wrong with changing your career path and realising that your calling lies elsewhere.

Group #2

Those who know approximately what they want from their courses

They are studying a subject because they want to work in an area related to their studies. However, they have not yet decided where, exactly. For example, a biology student could become either a lab researcher, or a teacher, or an environmental officer; an English student could work in education, journalism, marketing and communications, or in publishing; a mathematics student can become an accountant or a software engineer.

Those people have more general skills and specialise less. They are more flexible and perhaps career transition is also easier for them due to this flexibility. They do not have a clearly defined career goal but they know where approximately they would like to work, and, more importantly, where they would not like to work at all.

Group #3

Those who are specialising in the subject they like

Some students are not sure what exactly they want to do as a career. They just want to study a subject they enjoy because they think that university should be not only about what one *must* do, but also about what one *likes* to do. There are more people like this among humanities and social sciences students. Their subjects are academic: philosophy, history, politics, languages and linguistics, cultural studies, sociology, etc.

Their time at university is the time of searching, trying and testing – they try to find out what they like; they try to find out what they are good at and what doesn't motivate them that much.

There is absolutely nothing wrong with that. I must say that when those people become serious about what they are doing, they can reach enormous success – because one of the

essential components of success is enjoying what you're doing. But it takes some courage to make that final leap towards becoming serious. I hope that, having read this book, you will make that leap.

Group #4

Those who have been tricked into believing that going to university alone will land them a well-paid job and a great skyrocketing career

These people go to university 'to have better job prospects' – often without any other, more specific goals in mind. They do have a bit of the other three groups in them. On the whole, it is great that they do take initiative and try to enhance their chances of employment by continuing their education. What is not so great, however, is that they often let the university life just happen to them, waiting to graduate and be offered a job on a platter.

The bitter truth is that they do not realise that the world does not work like this anymore. If one merely does a degree without giving himself/herself a good account of what they are doing, golden opportunities can be missed. As I already said above, everyone is a graduate nowadays. Many have good degree classifications. Many have work experience. Those to whom university 'just happens' do not stand a chance.

I want *you* to become the guys and girls from Group Number One.

It is important to understand very clearly what you want from your university experience, both personally and professionally – and then claim it. You have to go for it and everything you do every day must contribute to that goal. You have to understand very clearly what you've got yourself involved in when you accepted that degree course offer.

I repeat: as soon as you step onto the campus, you enter a state of war. But this war is like nothing you've seen before. It is a war whose rules are so twisted that it might make your head spin.

But before we begin discussing the rules, let me tell you what you are offered when you enter university. In other words, what you're paying for. I want to do this now, in the beginning, so that you can start making plans regarding the best use of your time here.

DEAR READER,

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CHAPTER 4

WHAT DOES UNIVERSITY REALLY OFFER YOU?

I have to admit and acknowledge that being a fresher is not easy. Many of you are away from home for the first time. You have to adapt to your new life: living alone, living away from your family, managing the studying, the cooking, the shopping, the cleaning and the partying all by yourself. Independent life can be very hectic and difficult sometimes, and lecture material as well as homework can also be tough. Yet, your independent life has some enormous advantages, too. Finally, you've got a lot of time for yourself – and you can use that time to develop new skills, and those skills can extend way beyond writing an essay on the last day before the submission or crash-courses in smart exam revision. They can extend beyond learning to dance salsa, making delicious budget meals and living off your last cash before you are overdrawn.

I am talking about skills for life and for success. Skills that will make you employable and help you stand out.

I am sorry for sounding like an infomercial *again*, but I'm just telling you the truth. This book is about what chances university offers you and how to take advantage of them. For your tuition fees, university offers you a lot more than meets the eye. Besides the usual educational programme that involves the lecturers passing on their knowledge and then testing if you've been paying attention, university offers a lot of other things. They are there for you – but you have to go after them with a club. Sometimes you've got to work harder to find

opportunities to develop yourself – but you will always find them if you seek them.

So, here is what university offers you for your tuition fees:

1. Lectures, labs and seminars (obviously)
2. Testing and evaluation of your knowledge (duh!)

3. Opportunities to establish professional relations with your lecturers. After all, lecturers exist not only to stand in front of you and talk. They are there to help you – and it pays off to establish good relations with them. First of all, you can talk to your lecturers about any concerns you might have about your studies. Secondly, your lecturers are most likely to be the first people to provide you with a reference – so make sure they have a lot of great stuff to write about you!

4. Access to the library – both physical and electronic. The electronic library is especially important for assignment writing. Many students turn to academic books (or just course textbooks) when writing their essays; yet, they often miss out on academic journals that contain much more interesting and in-depth information than books. Most academic journals that universities subscribe to are kept in electronic format and checking out e-libraries as well as Google Scholar (<http://scholar.google.com>) is definitely worth it, especially if you want to deepen your knowledge and show your lecturer that you approach your assignments seriously. You can find more information about academic development on the websites I have already mentioned (*The Lecture Room* and *First Year Counts*), as well as in my book *From Confusion to Conclusion: How to Write a First Class Essay*.

5. On-campus internet. This may not seem much to you at first, but I think you will change your mind when you read **Chapter 12: Students and online presence**. In it, I explain that internet in university can be used for much more than checking your email and Facebook. Internet offers you enormous possibilities, and you should make good use of them all. Read **Chapters 12 and 13** to find out more.

6. Access to student clubs and societies. Usually you've got to pay a membership fee (about a fiver for an ordinary society; could be more for specialised sports clubs like martial arts), but it's not a lot compared to what being a member of a society can offer you. More information can be found in **Chapter 9: On Hiring Yourself (Get Involved)**.

7. Access to on-campus student jobs. A bit of extra cash as well as work experience is always handy. From the local pub to the university library, there are plenty of opportunities to find paid work. Many universities have their own job centres, too! You can find more information on student employment and work experience in **Chapter 8: How to Get Awesome Work Experience While You Are Still at University**.

8. A special status in society. If you're out of school, you are just another jobseeker. If you're a graduate who has not learnt how to be outstanding, you are just another jobseeker as well. However, if you are a student, people view you differently. You have a purpose, a reason to be in a certain place, a reason to look for work, and people think of you as a person who aims higher. It's a great reputation to have – so do not ruin it!

And finally, stemming from all the above, university offers you the following:

9. Opportunities to get work experience beyond the usual range of 'student jobs'

10. Opportunities to develop the most important skills for work and life: communication, teamwork, interpersonal, research and analysis, problem-solving – and, in fact, any professional skills for any occupation you desire

11. Opportunities to become a professional from the first day of the first year

12. Opportunities to stand out from the general pool of graduates and to become remarkable

Read on to find out how you can do it!

CHAPTER 5

A KIND WORD ABOUT THE ‘SOFT SUBJECTS’

NB: If you do study arts, humanities, social sciences (this includes business) or any other subject I mentioned in Chapter 2, please read this chapter carefully. If you happen to study a science or mathematics-related subject and happen to look down upon those who have elected ‘the soft option’, please read this chapter carefully, twice.

Several years ago I had a conversation with an elderly gentleman in the middle of Birmingham. I don’t remember how the conversation turned to my education, but the gentleman asked what I wanted to do with my life after university.

At that time, I had neither the courage to say I was going to be a writer, nor the discipline to write every day that would justify my choice of profession. So I said:

‘I hope to work in research, in university or a think-tank.’

It wasn’t entirely a lie – of all full-time jobs, research-related ones seemed the most appealing and the most interesting to me.

‘What, get paid for thinking?’ the man replied with a hint of irony in his voice. ‘What the world needs are more engineers and brain surgeons!’

I agreed with him then and I still do. Yet, I am neither an engineer nor a brain surgeon. I hold a First in International Relations and English. Having studied an academic, non-

vocational subject, should I be considered less valuable as an employee because of that? I don't think so. Let me explain why.

If we think seriously, what does a degree give you? A piece of paper that shows you know something? The paper, yes; I am not so sure about the knowledge, though. An advantage when looking for a better-paid job? Perhaps, but I would not count on that. Someone without a degree who has got several years of work experience can also be hired for the same skilled job. Lack of a degree does not equal lack of intelligence. Skills for doing certain jobs well? Yes, this one is a closer shot. A good vocational degree like pharmacy or engineering will indeed equip you with professional skills. But are these skills alone a guarantee of a good graduate position? Unfortunately, they are not.

A degree in the so-called 'soft subjects' can teach you to think. It can teach you not to believe one opinion but always check if that opinion can be backed up by facts. You will also learn that there can be more than one point of view (after all, even theories like the Big Bang or the Evolution are not absolute truths – they are just theories that are used by scientists because they explain some things in a way scientists like). It will teach you to read – because reading is a skill that must be learnt not only in primary school. People must continue to learn to read all their lives and 'soft' degrees will teach you to read a text, an event, a painting, a historical source, a pattern of human behaviour and trends in social movements. You will be taught to search for information in a clever manner and not to believe everything you read. You will also be taught some subject-specific skills which will depend on your degree choice. You will be taught to appreciate the beauty of human thought and countless forms of its expression.

But you will not be taught how to find a job. You will not be taught how to become employable.

In fact, even degrees like law or finance will not teach you how to get a job either, nor can they guarantee you will get one.

There is one general truth you must realise about university degrees. No degree – be it finance, IT, medicine, media studies, foreign languages or history of art – will ever benefit you unless you take it seriously.

There are no non-serious subjects in university – there are only non-serious approaches.

In other words, your degree – in fact, your entire university experience – is only what you decide to make of it. Everything depends on you. This thought is encouraging because no one should be able to question the value of your education, but it's also unsettling, because it puts the entire burden of responsibility for your employability on your shoulders.

Going back to my four groups of students (see **Chapter 3**), I must say that there are a lot of people in arts, humanities and social sciences who may enjoy the subject they indulge in just enough to make some real effort in classes, but they still lack determination to take their university life and their degree seriously. This prevents them from succeeding even if they like what they are doing.

In other words, they are not aware that university is a boot camp which has been already touched by the war (or that the paintball match is in full swing, if you like). They do not know they are supposed to fight for every opportunity to become better – and that the opportunities are out there for them, at arm's reach.

When I talk about my degree, I talk about it in two ways. First of all, I mention what it has *given* to me. Next, I tell what I *have taken* from it. Those things are not the same. What a degree (and your university) gives you is a limited number of items, handed to you on a golden platter. What you take from it is a great number of awesome things, but you have to go for them, armed with a big bad machine gun of determination. Your time at university can offer many experiences of which you are probably unaware.

I began taking what rightfully belonged to me rather late. However, when I gave myself a kick in the backside and took hold of my own success, my entire world turned upside-down...

But I'm rushing too much with the story. Let's talk about everything in the right order.

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CHAPTER 6

HOW I REALISED WHAT I WANTED FROM LIFE. AND THEN HOW I DID IT AGAIN. AND AGAIN

When I came to university, initially, I had chosen to study business. Even when enrolling, I knew it would not be what I like doing. Yet, for some stupid reason, I believed that my education should be practical. I did not want to 'indulge in a soft subject'. I had naively believed that one needs a 'practical' degree to get a good job – I didn't know several things back then.

I didn't know that a 'serious-sounding' degree title means nothing when you are looking for a job;

I didn't know that for most 'office' jobs it doesn't matter what degree course you have studied;

I didn't know that it's not a 'serious' degree that matters, but a serious attitude;

I didn't know that in order to succeed at something, one must enjoy it;

But then, I was a different person, too.

I was living a 'usual' student life. I did have a part-time job as a sales assistant that paid my bills. I was studying business administration, trying to be good at everything and even succeeding. I had good grades for mathematics and economics – not because I liked them but because I was trained to do well since the early days of school. I finished my first year with a

70% average grade and everything should have been good for me.

Except that it wasn't.

Towards the second term of the first year I realised that I did not enjoy what I was doing at all. I had been lying to myself, and I was able to do that for a year, but no longer. Then I decided that I had two choices: either to stay where I was and continue leading an unhappy and reclusive life, or to make a decision that took real courage and start doing something I truly enjoyed.

Changing my course was not easy.

Few people understood the motivation behind my decision.

I was attending a business studies course at a university with a great business school. I had a first class average grade for the first year. And yet, I decided to quit my course and study international relations and English. Why?

Many of my friends thought I was making the most irrational decision in my life. They said:

'No matter what you want to be in life, you should know how business operates. So, stick to what you're doing, grit your teeth and get through it!'

They were right about the first part: I had to learn how business operates. I am still learning it because being an author entrepreneur means living in a very competitive business setting. But I am learning it in a user-friendly environment, with no pressure on me. I am learning it because I want to.

But back then, every cell of my body screamed in protest. My brain refused to process lecture material. I felt I was out of place. I did not belong in the business studies programme, no matter how good it was. I could not pretend I liked it any longer – and I could not do something for which I had no enthusiasm.

Taking the decision to change my degree course was difficult. There were several reasons why:

1. I was an overseas student.

Most of my compatriots were studying in the business school, with some others in the school of engineering. All of them were 'showing they were serious about life because they were studying a "serious" subject'. International students do not study 'soft' subjects – this statistical fact turned into a public opinion that I had to counter, at least in my own mind.

2. The stigma attached to 'soft' subjects.

Usually subjects like arts, humanities, languages and social sciences are regarded as 'easy' and 'a soft option'. I had to go against the current and prove the opposite (see my reflections on it in the previous chapter).

3. I already owed the Student Loans Company.

One year of studies had been already paid for. I could not jump straight into the second year and had to start my course anew, from year one. This meant getting into more debt.

However, I did it. And if I had not done it, this book would have probably never been written.

It was only after making the change that I started following the advice that I am giving here. Because I was finally doing something in which I believed.

Moreover, I had a clear idea where I was heading. I had a goal, a purpose that fulfilled me both professionally and personally. I loved linguistics and I wanted to work in the field. Then I turned a little more business-like and landed a placement in communications, before going back to creative writing and non-fiction. My goals changed with time, the professional direction of my life shifted, but as I progressed through my studies and work, I realised more and more clearly what I really wanted from my studies, from my work and from my life.

I have always wanted to be a writer. And not just a grumpy solitary one who spends hours upon hours at his typewriter

and then silently hands his manuscript to the publisher. I wanted to be someone who inspires others, who can share his experiences and valuable information with others. Now I am here, doing that.

I achieved my goals for two simple reasons:

- I liked what I was doing and therefore was motivated to succeed at it;
- I realised that a serious degree course is nothing; a serious approach to your work is everything.

I did change my professional plans several times – perhaps sometimes I wanted to take many avenues at once to be safe and then discard some choices when certain doors closed. I wanted to get a placement in public relations, and I achieved this goal (you can read about it in **Chapter 9**, under the section called *How I Got a Work Placement in the Middle of the Recession*). Then I wanted to prove myself as an academic researcher and I got that, too: I published three papers and presented at conferences whilst still being an undergraduate; I wanted to try myself in translation and I got an internship in the EU thanks to the skills I have obtained during my university studies. Finally, I decided that, all this time, I wanted to be a writer, which has led me to writing this book as well as three others – one on creating a CV when you have little or no work experience and the other two on writing successful academic essays and dissertations. Here's the (incomplete) list of the outcomes of my course change:

1. A first class degree with a prize for academic achievement
2. A work placement as Communications Officer in a science research council
3. A wealth of experience in marketing, promotional work, communications and writing, all of which has led to me becoming an author entrepreneur

4. Three years' work experience as a writing mentor in the university library (teaching people essay writing skills). I wanted to share my knowledge and experience with others and wrote two books: *From Confusion to Conclusion: How to Write a First Class Essay* and *How -to Write a First-Class Dissertation* (the latter one is targeted at final-year students). Some chapters of the books as well as other great FREE content can be downloaded at www.FirstYearCounts.com and www.TheLectureRoom.co.uk
5. Runner-up in a student essay competition thanks to my passion for what I was studying
6. Three academic papers and two conference presentations in the field of linguistics while I was still an undergraduate. Anyone who is interested in publishing their undergraduate research, please see **Chapter 11**
7. Three short stories published in a small literary magazine
8. A FREE eBook called *How to Write a CV with Little or No Work Experience* published online, summing up my professional experience.
The entire eBook can be downloaded for FREE when you subscribe to the newsletter on www.TheLectureRoom.co.uk and www.FirstYearCounts.com
9. And finally – following my goals and becoming an author entrepreneur with dozens of ideas how to help others succeed

I don't know what you will make of this list, but to me this looks like I've got quite a lot done during university. And the best news is that if I could do it, you can do it, too. Of course, there's no need to repeat my path – carve your own and have fun in the process!

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CHAPTER 7

THE ONLY TWO STEPS TOWARDS SUCCESS YOU WILL EVER NEED TO TAKE

In this chapter, I will talk about becoming successful.

Everyone defines (professional) success in their own way. For some, success means a well-paid job and quick cash to buy a house (or several). For others, success is a job that pays just about enough, but which they thoroughly enjoy and that brings pleasure. Some define success as getting paid for one's hobby. For some, success is doing a job they find meaningful – for example, through being able to help people in need. It does not matter what definition of success you use. All I want to do is share some advice on how to achieve it, starting from the first days of your first year.

In order to become successful at university, you need two very simple things: ***to get involved and to be seen.***

The rest of this book will tell you exactly how to do it. So, what exactly do I mean?

Getting Involved in extracurricular activities is the key to getting work experience at university. In plain English, it means that you will have to spend a lot of time doing stuff. This means joining student societies for *active* membership; it also means volunteering to help your university as much as you can by becoming a course representative or getting involved in university management (I will talk about it in detail in

Chapter 8: How to Get Awesome Work Experience at University).

Being seen is paramount in the modern world if you want to succeed. A crowd of graduates is exactly what it looks like – a crowd. Moreover, it is a very noisy crowd where everyone roars: *Hire me! Hey, Mr. Big Boss, look over here! I'm here, educated, talented, a real problem solver, motivated! Hire me! Buy my talent!*

So, how do you get heard in a crowd where everyone shouts?

The answer is: don't shout.

Your voice will never be heard in a crowd because you cannot shout louder than those thousands of people. What you can do, however, is talk to ONE person.

However, there is one condition, which is absolutely necessary for that person to start listening to you. They have to know you and think you are worth listening to.

In other words, you have to be famous with them. Famous in a small circle. More importantly, ***famous on the internet.***

In the modern world, when it comes to employment and making money, either by having a full-time job or by managing your own business, there is only one sure way to become famous: get online and do something useful, free of charge.

Yes, you heard me right. You have to become unselfish in order to achieve greatness. Because this is why you picked up this book in the first place, right?

Now, all of this might seem a bit confusing to you at the start, but I will explain everything in **Chapter 12: Students and Online Presence** and **Chapter 13: A Short Blogging Course**. When you reach those chapters, I ask you to read them carefully. They contain information university is not likely to teach you.

The next chapter will tell you how to get work experience.

CHAPTER 8

HOW TO GET AWESOME WORK EXPERIENCE AT UNIVERSITY

University is much more than your course of study. One of the most fascinating secrets about university is that it is a perfect place for getting invaluable work experience.

So, let's start from the basics. There are five main ways to get work experience while you are a student:

1. Having a standard part-time student job
2. Doing paid and unpaid internships
3. Volunteering inside and outside university
4. Becoming a freelancer

and, most importantly,

5. *Hiring yourself and becoming responsible for your own fate.*

The fifth point is what this book is all about. However, for now let's talk about all the points in greater detail. I will describe each of them and assess its advantages and drawbacks. Let's go!

8.1. Having a Part-Time Student Job

If you happen to hold one of those, consider yourself lucky. This means that your university is situated in a town or city large

enough to need part-time workforce. One of the easiest ways to get a part-time student job is to ask around the campus – more often than not, universities employ their own students. Here's a list of jobs you can do without even leaving the campus:

- Catering (kitchen work, washing dishes, serving tables, etc.)
- Pub work (bartender, waitress, etc.)
- Campus shops (bookstore, stationer shop, food outlets, etc.)
- Cleaning/Housekeeping (forget about it being 'prestigious' or not – a job is a job)
- Casual administrative work (e.g. stuffing envelopes – just ask around the busy offices; moreover, jobs like these are often advertised by email)
- Library work (shelving, etc.); also seasonal, but they often need help
- Mentoring (this is not so common, but sometimes university libraries do take student tutors, especially if they are exceptionally good with figures and can help their fellow students with maths; some universities also have academic writing mentors – I've worked as one for three years)
- Student ambassadors (those jobs are fairly common; you tell school kids and sixth formers how many terrific opportunities university offers as well as performing other tasks, e.g., administrative)
- Promotional work (e.g. leaflet distribution and becoming a 'brand ambassador')

Of course, this list is far from exhaustive. Those opportunities do differ from university to university. They are all great, for several reasons. First of all, they pay your bills – and this is one of the main concerns for students. Secondly, they give you some work experience. It is not true that to gain those transferable skills, which everyone says modern

graduates lack, you need to hold an office job. Things like motivation, teamwork, working on your own initiative and commercial awareness can be learnt in a pub or in a team of hotel porters. There is a lot you can talk about during an interview or write in your application form: managing conflicts, co-operating with the rest of the team to achieve a particular goal, effective communication, taking initiative etc. Employers do not demand office experience because they understand it is hard to get when one is an undergraduate.

Yet, no matter how proud you might be of your achievements in a particular job, it still is nothing but a student job. You have responsibilities, yet, let's face it: your initiatives are largely the result of the boss breathing down your neck.

If you want to achieve something truly remarkable, you should take initiative by yourself. You should do something because you want to create value – and not just for your boss who will praise you. I will talk more about it in Section 8.5. For now, let's move to the next work experience opportunity.

8.2. Placements and Internships

Of course, those are a little harder to get than a normal student job. You need to find ways to present your limited experience in a way that will convince your future employer that your every achievement is worthy of a Nobel Prize. You can read about this in my eBook *How to Write a CV with Little or No Work Experience* which you can download for free either from *The Lecture Room* or *First Year Counts*.

Internships have one great disadvantage: they are scarce and competition for them can be enormous. Let's admit it: not everyone will get them. Moreover, internships are offered in a limited number of fields. They are all rather mainstream: business-related (accounting, finance, human resources, etc.); engineering of all sorts (mechanical, electric, software, etc.); media and publishing in large corporations; research and analysis of different kinds. If you want to work in a more

‘exotic’ area, such as creative arts or education, placements and internships are much rarer and harder to get.

Naturally, if an internship is either paid, or very prestigious, or both, there will be a lot of competition. One of the ways to beat competition is volunteering. The next section is all about it.

8.3. Volunteering

Broadly speaking, volunteering means giving your time and effort to work with a charity or a non-profit organisation so that your work benefits the wider community.

Volunteering can benefit you in several ways. First of all, being only an undergraduate ***you can get a job that you normally wouldn't*** – that's why it is so important to you, as a student. You can work as a PR officer, a charity fundraiser, an editor, an actor/actress, a photographer, a social worker, a journalist for a serious website, an environmental officer, a music production engineer or an events manager... You can also work in art and design-related fields. The opportunities are endless. Volunteering can be a great way to get ahead for people of creative professions.

Secondly, your future employer will be only too pleased to see that you've freely given something you cannot get back – your time and effort. Managers like to see that you've invested in yourself, learnt new skills and contributed to a greater cause. ***It looks great on your CV.***

Thirdly, you get to meet new interesting people and develop a sense of achievement, of meaningful work that benefits not only you but also someone else. Volunteering changes lives – including that of the volunteer – and there is a lot to be learnt from it.

There are two types of voluntary work available for students: in the university and outside it. The number of opportunities depends on the size of the town you are living in. Almost every university has a volunteer centre. It is definitely

worth visiting them to find out what opportunities there are. Here are the key areas in which people normally volunteer:

- Children and young people
- Vulnerable adults
- Health
- Conservation and the environment
- Arts, culture and media
- Sports and leisure

Another place to volunteer is your own student union: you could join a committee or a steering group and have a say in the way your own university is run. You could also run for student officer elections. If you have ideas that could help make university a better experience for students, do not hesitate to become active!

There is also another, more exotic way to volunteer and make a difference, increasingly popular nowadays: going to a Third World country and working for a specific amount of time to benefit the local community. Usually British students build schools or medical and sanitary facilities, teach English and work on various other community projects. These opportunities are invaluable because the exposure to other cultures and ways of looking at the world can actually change *your* life. They teach you how rewarding such work can be, equip you with a great number of skills necessary for employment and give you something outstanding to talk about at a job interview. However, not everyone can afford such experience – in terms of time or money. Not everyone is free of family commitments. Not everyone can go and do some charitable work in a foreign country because there are communities next door that also need help. It's popular, but not mainstream.

When it comes to volunteering 'at home', universities are usually connected to volunteering schemes that exist nationwide, so you could find that activities inside and outside

university overlap quite a lot. Check out these links for volunteering in the United Kingdom:

<http://www.volunteering.org.uk/>

www.do-it.org.uk

<http://www.csv.org.uk/volunteering>

There is one important thing you need to remember when looking for volunteering opportunities: there is always something for you. Even if the area in which you would like to volunteer is not advertised, you **MUST** go and ask around. Whether you'd like to volunteer in a museum or in a theatre, or even with the police... all you have to do is go and inquire. If they say no, do not give up. Be persistent. Sometimes the reason you get a 'no' is because you talk to a wrong person who is just too busy or does not like making additional effort. Do not give up and keep asking around.

8.4. Becoming a Freelancer

If you feel you've got some skills that you could sell, it's worth looking into freelancing opportunities. Being a self-employed freelancer can have many benefits. You are in charge of your own schedule, have an opportunity to work from home and still gain and develop an impressive set of skills to put on your CV that will make employers interested in you. First of all, you develop your entrepreneurial skills because being a freelancer is the same as having your own business. You must find an opportunity to apply your skills, gradually build a great reputation and thus increase the number of clients. What is more, you develop outstanding self-motivation because your work depends entirely on your initiative. Here are some things you can do as a student:

Teaching

Become a freelance tutor. Put up an advert on the wall in your university, advertising your skills:

- Languages (including English as a second language)
- Maths (especially in demand; pretty profitable, too!)
- IT
- Science
- Practically, anything else you want, from graphic design to fine pottery

You can also go to a few local schools and put up your advert there. There will always be people who need some additional mentoring – and they (or their parents) will be ready to pay you for your efforts.

Also, for tutoring in the UK, visit these sites:

<http://www.uktutors.com/>

[http://www.localtutor.co.uk/Tuition Information/
UK Tutors.html](http://www.localtutor.co.uk/Tuition%20Information/UK%20Tutors.html)

<http://www.firsttutors.com/uk/>

You can register on those sites for free and advertise your services as a freelance tutor in any field from art design to zoology, as well as set your rates. I advise you to be competitive and not charge too much – after all, you are only an undergraduate student, not a PhD graduate with 10 years of experience. See how much others charge for their services and charge a slightly lower price. Do not make it too low, either – we don't want everyone to lower their prices in a hectic 'race to the bottom'.

Translation and interpreting

Speak another language at native level and have good communication skills? Try freelance translation and interpreting. Just find out email addresses of as many agencies as you can, and apply to all of them. Even as a student, you can get plenty of work and use your language skills. It is also a highly rewarding job: after all you're helping people communicate! Yet, it can be rather tough, too – I have worked

as a freelance public service interpreter and on several occasions I've had to interpret for asylum seekers in solicitors' offices as well as in HM prisons. I must say that the experience was rather emotionally draining. Female interpreters can get jobs at maternity hospitals and abortion clinics. One must have a certain mindset to work in those areas – but if you're up for it, then it's an excellent chance to hone your language skills and earn some cash in the process.

Other freelance projects

If you have certain abilities, teaching is not your only option – you might want to work according to those abilities. There are many websites through which you can find, and bid for, freelance projects. Here are some examples of what you can do:

- Website design
- Writing, proofreading and editing
- Transcribing (typing words from audio recordings)
- Graphic design
- Translation
- Computer programming

There is one problem with doing freelance work – when you are an undergraduate student people tend to regard you as unreliable. In order for people to take you more seriously, you need to have a solid portfolio of works, some testimonies and experience. Naturally, in the beginning these are hard to get – but if you are ready to grit your teeth and work hard for your goals, you can build yourself as a professional by your final year. It takes time to build a serious portfolio, but, should you decide to pursue freelancing further, it is really worth it.

In the next chapters, I will talk about how to build a portfolio that showcases your best work. I would like to note, however, that every professional – not only freelancers, but also those in full time employment – must have a portfolio of

best works, so making the effort to do this now can only be an advantage to you later.

8.5. Hiring Yourself and Becoming Responsible for Your Own Fate

This point may seem a bit strange and hard to understand at first. Let me clarify it.

What do I mean by 'hiring yourself'? Every student wants to be a graduate and eventually become a professional in one area or another. Every student wants to be employable and be hired – and it doesn't matter what job you want to do in the future. Being a corporate lawyer involves being hired as much as does being a charity worker, a rock singer or even a writer. There is always a person on whom a professional depends: formal employees with permanent contracts depend on their bosses; freelance graphic designers depend on their customers; rock singers depend on their listeners; writers depend on their editors and readers (more on the latter, actually, because an editor can reject a good book but a reader will never do it).

Those are the people who hire you, who are willing to pay for your talent, invest in your potential and gain something out of it.

However, there is one enormous mistake that the majority of students make. They wait till their graduation to be hired. They do not have the experience of what it really means to be ***hired***.

Even those who do have part-time jobs, or even manage to land fancy internships in companies with loud names, sometimes don't know what it really means to be hired.

How can this be? What do I mean? What does it mean to be hired, then?

Being hired means being made responsible for something. Even simplest, unskilled jobs involve a degree of responsibility. However, when it comes to the work opportunities at university that I have mentioned above, the first three (part-

time student jobs, internships, and volunteering) involve being accountable to someone. There is always a boss over you. There is always someone who regulates your actions. Therefore, sometimes your job, however, wonderful, can restrict the number of skills you can learn.

For example, in some jobs you work on your own. Those kinds of jobs do help you improve your self-motivation and encourage you to take initiative, but they don't help you develop your teamwork skills at all (good examples of those types of jobs are cold-calling, street fundraising or even housekeeping). Other jobs help you enhance your research skills, but may teach you nothing about commercial awareness. In short, one job, or one type of activity cannot teach you everything.

When it comes to self-employment, you have more freedom to regulate your own activities and learn more skills that make you employable. However, you have the biggest freedom to develop yourself as a professional when you decide to *hire yourself* – in other words, when you start doing something that places all responsibility for the process, the outcomes, and the skills you will learn into your own hands.

This is also the most difficult path: you are not accountable to anyone but yourself. It can be hard to find the strength to do all those things at once and juggle your studies with a part-time job and all those activities that help you gain important skills. However, there is no other way. You have to learn to juggle them – and that is why it is vital that you start from the first day of the first year, while the global panic about decimal points of the average grade has not yet gripped you by the throat.

In this book, getting hired means becoming responsible first and foremost to yourself. Even when you work for someone else, you must ask yourself the following questions: What am I doing here? Am I doing this job well? How much can I learn at this job? What can I do to learn more? How much more can I learn here?

However, once you understand that you are not only an employee, but also the boss; once you take your future into your hands and have the freedom to develop yourself in whichever direction, those questions start burning your mind with intensity you have not experienced before.

So, how do you *hire yourself*? As always, here's the list of what you need to do:

1. Take things seriously;
2. Decide what you like and what you want;
3. Become active;
4. Become well-known with a narrow audience;
5. Become *unselfish*.

In the following chapters, I will explain what I mean by each of these.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

VLAD MACKEVIC is an author entrepreneur, an academic writing expert and an employability consultant. He writes fiction for the soul (under the pen-name Roy Eynhallow) and non-fiction for the mind. In 2011, he graduated from Aston University, Birmingham with a First Class degree in International Relations and English Language. This book was written to sum up Vlad's professional experience and to share it with you for your benefit and enjoyment.

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